THE MANDAR HILL—A GENERAL SURVEY

By

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The Mandar hill, situated to the south of the Ganges at a distance of about thirty miles from Bhagalpur (Bihar) by the side of the Bhagalpur-Dumka road, is an offshoot of the Vindhyas.[1] It is a massive rock of granite[2] with about 7 to 8 hundred ft. high.[3] The footpath from the base to the summit runs for about a mile and the circumference at the base seems to be about three-four miles.[4] Its oval-shaped summit resembles the Golghar of Patna.[5]

Lying in the territory of ancient Aṅga this hill has been closely associated with India's mythology and history. The *Purāṇas* state that at the time of the churning of the Sea of Milk by the Devas (Aryans) and the Asuras (non-Āryans) this hill was made the churning-rod.[6] A careful perusal of this sea-churning legend of the *Purāṇas* makes it clear that the non-Āryans held their sway in the region dominated by Mandar hill.[7] This may be the country of the Mandei and the Malli of Pliny lying between the Calingae and the Ganges.[8] This tract is still largely populated by the non-Āryan tribes of the Santhals, Bhūmiyas, Kādaras, etc. A hill situated about nine miles to the south of Mandar hill still bears the name Mālī (locally called Mālī Pahāḍa).

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1. जाह्नव्या दक्षिणे कूले विन्ध्यपृष्ठसमाश्रितम् ।
   मन्दारेति च विख्यातं सर्वभागवतप्रियम् ।।
   Varāha Purāna, ch. 143, v. 2; also quoted in the *Krtyakalpataru* of Bhatta Laksmidhara (c, A. D. .125), pt, VIII *(tirthavivecanakānda)*, Baroda Oriental Institute, 1942, ch. 16, p, 217.
2. *JASB*, XX (1851), p. 272; Buchanan, *An Account of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810-11*, Patna, 1939, p. 122.
3. *JASB*, XX (1851), p. 272; B. C. Law, *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, p 235.
4. *IA*, I (1872), p. 54.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Srimadbhāgavata, skandha* 8, ch 6, V. 22; *Visnu Purāna, amsa* 1, ch. 9, v. 84; *Padma Purāna, brahmakhanda*, ch. 8, vv. 20-21 and ch. 9, vv. 1-3; *Kurma Purāna*, ch. 1, v. 27
7. For details vide A. K. Choudhary, *Mandāra Paricaya*, Bhagalpur, 1956, pp. 17-27.
8. Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India*, London, 1871, p. 508.

Certain important sources indicate that Mandar Hill has been a noted centre of the Bhāgavatas or the Vaiṣṇavas. The *Varāha Purāṇa* clearly states that Mandāra is dear to all the Bhāgavatas (*sarvabhāgavata-priyam*).[9] God Viṣṇu under the title Madhusūdana (destroyer of Madhu) is said to reside there (*mandāre madhusūdanam*).[9] The *Narasiṁha Purāṇa* records that *mandāragiriketanaḥ* (one having Mount Mandāra as his abode, symbol or standard) is one of the appellations of Viṣṇu.[10] Worship of god Madhusūdana on or near Mandar hill during the reign of Akbar, the great Mughal emperor, is testified by an inscription in Sanskrit in the Maithilī script (old Bengali character of the Tirhut type), found on a slab of stone fixed in the northern wall of a small *maṭha* (shrine) situated just at the foot of the hill towards the east. It states that Chatrapati, son of Vāsudeva built an abode of victory (temple) for god Madhusūdana in the Śaka year 1521 (A. D. 1599) when Duḥśāsana, a brāhmaṇa was acting as the priest.[11]

A small black-stone image of god Madhusūdana is still worshipped in a temple at Baunsi, a village about two miles to the south of Mandar hill. Worship of god Narasiṁha on Mandar hill also bears testimony to its being a seat of the Bhāgavatas. A Mandar hill inscription running in seven lines in Sanskrit discovered among Vaidyanātha temple inscriptions at Deoghar in the district of Santhal Parganas (Bihar) records that king Ādityasena along with his queen Koṇadevī made an establishment of god Nṛhari (man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu) apparently

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9 Ch. 143, v. 2.

10. *Narasimha Purāna*, ch. 65, v. 7; also quoted in the *Krtyakalpataru, Tirthavivecanakānda*, ch. 23, p 251; *Garuda Pūrāna, purvakhanda*, ch. 81, v. 15; *Agni Purāna*, ch. 305, v. 9; *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Srikrisna Misra, ed. Raoji Sarma Gondhalekaren, 3rd ed. A. D. 1886, Act VI, p. 164; *Yogini Tantra*, Patala 4, v. 22. Sometimes we come across the expression मन्दरे मधुसूदनम् instead of मन्दारे मधुसूदनम्. As *Mandara* and *Mandāra* are synonymous (vide *Anekārthatilaka* of Mahipa. Poona, 1947, ch. 3, v, 214 (p. 58), both the expressions are identical in sense.

11. Ch. 40, v. 44:

चन्द्रः पक्षमनोज वाणधरणीत्यङ्काङ्कितेवत्सरे
शाके पुण्य महीतले द्विजवरे दुःशासने पूजके ।
चक्रे श्रीमधुसूदनस्य विजयागारं वरं निर्म्मलं
श्रीमत्छत्रपतिः सदाशुभमतिः श्रीवासुदेवात्मजः ।।
—शाके १५२१

Noticed in the proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal for November 1870, p. 295.

at Mandar hill (*cakāra saṁsthāṁ nṛhareḥ sa eva*).[12] The names of king Ādityasena and his wife Koṇadevī are also mentioned in two other Mandar hill inscriptions in Sanskrit which state that queen Koṇadevī, the dear wife of Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Śrī Ādityasena deva got a tank (*puṣkariṇī*) constructed obviously on or near Mandar hill.[13] This tank appears to be either the present Pāpahāriṇi situated at the foot of the hill[14] or the present Sītā Kuṇḍa lying near the present cave-temple of god Narasiṁha. The Aphsad (Gaya district),[15] the Shahpur (Patna district)[16] and the Deo-Baranarka (Shahabad district)[17] inscriptions also tell us about Ādityasena who was the son of Mādhavagupta of Magadha and was alive in A. D. 672.[18] The present cave-temple of god Narasiṁha on the hill also contains an old inscription in eight or nine lines covering a space of about two cubits long and two cubits broad. But perhaps, this inscription has not yet been deciphered. The nature of its location, however, may suggest that it, too, deals with the establishment of god Narasiṁha.

The Mandar hill inscription found at Deoghar refers to the installation of an image of God Varāha (the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu) by one Balbhadra *(sthāpito balabhadreṇa varāho bhuktimuktidaḥ)* evidently on Mandar hill. About fifteen years back a small beautiful image of Varāha along with two other small images of Viṣṇu has been dug out on the hill near the Sītā Kuṇḍa tank. This may be the image of Varāha installed by Balabhadra. All these three images are now lying at the Mandar Vidyāpītha situated just at the foot of the hill. Mandar hill is also noted for the three figures of Viṣṇu lying on his serpent-bed *(śeṣaśāyī Viṣṇu)* Two of them are found in the Sītā Kuṇḍa and one at the base of the hill towards the south-east. These along with one such figure of Viṣṇu on the Ajagaibinath hill of Sultanganj may be said to be a type of exquisite pieces of art not only of the district of Bhagalpur but of the whole of Bihar.

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12. Noticed in *JASB*, LII, pt. I, 1883, pp. 190-191, No. 3; and also in *CII*, III, 1888, pp. 212-213, footnote 6.
13. *CII*, III, 1888, Nos. 44 and 45 (pp. 211-212).
14. "This tank is to be found at the foot of the steps leading to the top of the hill and is now called *Pāpahāriṇī*." R. D. Banerji, *Prehistoric, Ancient and Hindu India*, 1939, p. 196.
15. *CII*, III, 1888, No. 42 (pp. 200 ff.)
16. *Ibid.*, No. 43 (pp. 208 ff.)
17. *Ibid*, No. 46 (pp. 213 ff.)
18. R. D. Banerji, *Prehistoric, Ancient and Hindu India*, 1939, p. 196; B. C. Sen, *Some Historical Aspects of the Inscriptions of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1942, p. 282; R C. Majumdar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. I, Dacca, 1943, p. 81, fn. 6.

The *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidāsa refers to the footmarks of Viṣṇu on the slopes of Mandāra.[19] This Mandāra may be this Mandar hill which still contains several footmarks carved out on the rock.

Thus it is evident that Mandar hill has been an important seat of the Bhāgavatas since long. It was possibly this sanctity of Mandar hill as a Vaiṣṇavite centre that impelled Caitanya, the great Vaiṣṇava saint of Bengal, to pay a visit to this place in A. D. 1505.[20]

It appears from the statement in several *Purāṇas* that Mandar Hill was an abode of lord Śiva as well.[21] Certain Śivaliṅgas are still found on the hill. But at present Mandar is not prominent for the worship of lord Śiva. It cannot, however, be denied that originally Mandar, being situated in the non-Āryan belt, must have been an eminent place of Śiva worship, as Śiva was the most favourite deity of the non-Āryans. But in course of time with the coming of the Āryans Viṣṇu seems to have predominated over Śiva on this hill.

The Mandar hill is sacred to the Jainas *as well*. They believe that their 12th Tīrthaṅkara Vāsupūjyanātha of Campāpurī (Champanagar, Bhagalpur) attained *nirvāṇa* on this very hill. The two temples on the summit of the hill are at present under the possession of the Jainas and about twenty-two years back they have built a Digambara Jaina temple at Baunsi near the present Madhusūdana temple. Every year the Jainas come in large numbers to pay a visit to this hill and offer their worship. But old traces of Jainism are not available on or near this hill.

Buddhism does not appear to have any significant hold on Mandar hill. The inscription taken from Col. Franklin's *Inquiry concerning the site of Ancient Palibothra*, part II and said to be a commemorative record of the dedication of a statue or a *caitya* probably of the sixth century A. D. by Paramabhaṭṭāraka Mahārājādhirāja Śri Ugrabhairava does not tell us anything specific that may establish Buddhist influence on

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19. पद्मनाभचरणाङ्किताश्मसु······मन्दरस्य कटकेषु······
Kumārasambhava, canto 8, v. 23.

20. As recorded in the western wall of the tiny Caitanya shrine at the foot of Mandar hill; vide also Prabhudatta Brahmachari, *Shrī Shrī Caitanya-Caritāvalī*; Gītā Press, Gorakhapur, 3rd ed. Sam. 2009, pt. I, p. 250.

21. *Linga Purāna, purvārdha*, ch. 53, v. 9; *Vāmana Purāna*, ch. 66, vv. 42-48, ch. 68, vv. 4-5; ch. 69, vv. 81-82, *Padma Purāna, uttarakhanda*, ch. 1, vv. 4-5, *pātāla-khanda*, ch. 105, vv. 38-54.

Mandar hill.[22] Certain images may reveal something of Buddhism but they have not yet been closely studied.

Several *Purāṇās* and other literary texts mention Mandar as a sacred place or a place of pilgrimage.[23] The *Varāha Purāṇa* states that persons having baths in the Mandāra kuṇḍa achieve the highest goal and those who give up life in this kuṇḍa go to the world of Viṣṇu.[24] Modern Pāpahāriṇī tank seems to be identical with this Mandāra Kuṇḍa. Thousands of Hindus still have baths in this tank on the Makarasaṁkrānti day in the month of Māgha corresponding generally to the 14th of January. It is again mentioned in the *Varāha Purāṇa* that Mandāra contains eleven *kuṇḍās (kuṇḍānyekādasā'nyatra)*[25] in all. These *kuṇḍas* (reservoirs of water), besides the above noted Mandāra kuṇḍa or the Pāpahāriṇī, may now be identified with the Sītā Kuṇḍa, the Śaṅkha Kuṇḍa, the Śiva Kuṇḍa, the Saubhāgya Kuṇḍa, the Godāvarī Kuṇḍa, the Varāha Kuṇḍa, the Laksmī Kuṇḍa, etc.[26]

The Mandar hill contains several caves as well. One of them, now, known as the cave of the famous sage Śukadeva lying a little above the Godāvarī Kuṇḍa to the left of the main footpath midway between the Sītā Kuṇḍa and the summit appears to have been inhabitable. The steep

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22. परमभट्टार—
क महाराजाधिरा—
ज श्री उग्रभैर—
वस्य देयिचय-- or देयधर्म्म as noticed in the *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for Nov. 1870, pp. 294-295.

23. *Varāha Purāna*, ch. 143, *Narasimha Purāna*, ch. 65; *Garuda Purāna purvakhanda*, ch. 81, vv. 15-16; *Krityakalpataru*, pt. VIII (*tīrthavivecanakānda*), ch. 16; *Yoginī Tantra, patala* 4, v. 22; Sant Lal Mishra, *Mandāra-Madhusūdana Māhātmya*, Sam. 1993, ch. 2 (pp. 12 ff,).

2. तीर्थे मन्दारकुण्डे तु एकभक्तोषितो नरः ।
स्नानं करोति शुद्धात्मा स गच्छेत् परमां गतिम् ।।
अत्र प्राणान् प्रमुञ्चेत कुण्डे मन्दारसंज्ञिते ।
तपः कृत्वा महाभागे मम लोकं स गच्छति ।।

—*Varāha Purāna* quoted in the *Krityakalpataru*, pt. VIII, p. 217.

25. *I bid.*

26. For the location of these *kundas* on the hill see A. K. Choudhary, *Mandāra Paricaya*, Bhagalpur 1956, pp. 28 ff.

and deep valley just below it presents a very sublime look. A place now called Rāmajhaḍokhā or Yogamaṭha situated a little below the summit towards the south-east also appears to have veen habitable. Ten to fifteen persons can sit together conveniently at this site. The floor of this abode contains two footprints said to be of God Viṣṇu and it is protected from sun and rain by a roof of huge rock. The Śītā Kuṇḍa and the Pāpahāriṇī tanks are clearly visible from the place.

Once this hill seems to have possessed several buildings or temples. Ruins or remains of some of them are still traceable. At present the hill contains only four buildings—the two temples on the summit, one Śiva temple just above the Śaṅkha Kuṇḍa, and a hermitage to give shelter to the hermit-priest of the adjoining Narasiṁha cave-temple.

The hill further possesses a large number of images and figures of of gods and goddesses. Prominent among them are the images and figures of Viṣṇu, Narasiṁha, Vāmana, Ganeśa, Sarasvatī, a few eight or ten-handed and three-headed images and certain *Śivaliṅgas*. Besides, a little above the base of the hill towards the south-east a beautiful representation of the snake Vāsuki, said to have been used as string to tie the hill at the time of the churning of the Sea of Milk, is visible. Moreover, a huge stone-carving of a human figure on a sloping rock to the north of the Sītā Kuṇḍa and midway between the Śaṅkha Kuṇḍa and the Ākāśa Gaṅgā close to the cave-temple of god Narasiṁha, is worth noticing. Captain W. S. Sherwill states that this colossal figure is in a sitting posture; the head from the top of the forehead to the bottom of the chin measures six feet and seven inches; and taking the head to be one-eighth of the body the entire length of the standing figure will come up to fifty-two feet and eight inches (6 ft. 7 inches x 8 ft. = 52 ft. 8 inches). He further observes that this figure bears likeness to Egyptian sculpture and is still (A. D. 1851) attributed to the Kol Rājās.[27] It is now generally known as Madhukaitabha although some persons feel attracted to call it Bhīma. As this hill was intimately associated with the non-Āryans and still lies close to the Ādivāsī belt it is highly probable that this non-Āryan majestic figure was carved at the instance of some non-Āryan (Kol) local chief.

The main footpath leading to the summit is generally made of rock-cut stair or footsteps. These steps appear to be old but beautiful

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27. *JASB*, XX (1851), pp. 272-275.

and are about four hundred in number. Buchanan noticed them in A. D. 1810 and Sherwill in A. D. 1851.

Below the hill, just at its foot towards the east and for about a mile or two in its surrounding area there are ruins and remains of several old buildings, structure, images and tanks,[28] Among them a big stone image of a cow, called Kāmadhenu, situated about half a mile to the east of the hill in a dilapidated temple, deserves special mention. It is probably a rare image of Bihar and it may be taken as an additional evidence in support of Mandar being an important place of the Vaiṣṇavas. Buchanan states that this image of cow was built by Raja Chotor Sen of the Chol caste who governed Mandar before the Khetauri, the Not (Nat) and the Rajputs, and who originally erected buildings and stair on the hill.[29] This Chotor Sen and Raja Chhatrasen of the Cola tribe who is referred to in *An Account of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810-11*[30] seem to be identical.

It is, however, not known how the Colas who ruled in south India came to have such a close association with Mandar hill. It is true that a General of Rajendra Cola I (A. D. 1012-1044) in course of his raids over Orissa and Bengal (A. D. 1021-1023) advanced up to the southern bank of the Ganges opposite Gauḍa marching through Daṇḍabhukti, Dakṣiṇa Rāḍhā and Uttara Rāḍhā.[31] But he is not known to have raided a single part of modern Bihar. When I consulted A. S. Altekar in A. D. 1950, in this connection, he stated that the Colas never invaded Bhagalpur.[32] The Cola tribe of Mandar as referred to by Buchanan may be a misnomer for the Kol (Kola) tribe whose dominance in Mandar in former days cannot be ruled out.

Coming again to Chotor Sen, the builder of the Kāmadhenu, we may further identify him with Catura, a man of means and by caste Gvālā (cowherd) to whom the *tappas* (estates) of Canduārī and Canḍipā in the Bhagalpur pargana of the Monghyr sarkar of the Bihar subah were at first mortgaged and then transferred by sale in 1008 H (A. D. 1599-1600) by

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28. For details see A. K. Choudhary, *Mandāra Paricaya*, Bhagalpur, 1956, pp. 64 ff.
29. *Journal of Francis Buchanan* kept during the survey of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810-11, edited by Oldham, Patna, 1930, pp. 20-21.
30. Buchanan, *An Account of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810-11*, Patna, 1939, p. 122.
31. R. D. Banerji, *Prehistoric, Ancient and Hindu India*, 1939, p. 277; *History of Bengal* Vol. I (ed. R. C. Majumdar), 1943, pp 137-138; see also K. A. Nilakantha Sastri, *The Colas*, 2nd ed. University of Madras, 1955, pp. 206-210.
32. A. K. Choudhary, *Mandāra Paricaya*, Bhagalpur, 1956, p. 59.

one Jujhāra, Rajput by caste[33] This Catura being a distinguished *gopa* (cowherd) and living not far away from Mandar,[34] may have installed this image of Kāmadhenu. But in the absence of definite proof it is not safe to take this Catura of the time of Akbar to be the builder of this Kāmadhenu temple.

We do not have any direct evidence of a large town or city once existing near Mandar hill; but the open space for a mile or two in the vicinity of the hill particularly towards the east and the south replete with numerons tanks, and ruins and remains of several old buildings, structure and images may suggest the existence of a town or city in former days.[35] According to local tradition the city near Mandar was called Bāliśānagara after Bāliśā, a Gandharva (demi-goddess) lady and it contained 88 tanks, 53 roads or lanes and 52 markets.[36] Tradition further asserts that this town had a large temple where one lac earthen lamps brought from every house burnt on the occasion of the Dīpāvalī.[37] Although the figure of the lamps and houses appear to be hyperbolic, the fact of the burning of numerous lamps is attested by the ruins of a building just at the foot of the hill towards the east, a dilapidated wall of which is full of small notches (*tākhā*), all identical in shape and size apparently for accommodating lamps on the occasion of the Dīpāvalī or on other special occasions. The present village of Lakhapurā, about a mile to the north-east of the hill seems to be reminiscent of this tradition of a city near Mandar hill consisting of a lac (*lakṣa or lākha*) houses. Modern Baunsi, a village to the south of the hill, is supposed to be a remnant of the old city of Bāliśā. But the name Baunsi may be a distortion of the term *vanaśrī* (forest-beauty) as this locality including Mandar hill was a forest-covered belt in continuation of the territory called Jharkhand (Jhāḍa-

33. *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. XLIII, pt. II, No. 86, April-June 1932, pp. 109 ff; *JBRS*, XLII, pts. 3-4 (Sept-Dec. 1956), pp. 333-341.

34. Descendants of this Catura still live in Bharako, Rāmapur, Kumārapur and Goragāmā villages near Amarpur in the Banka Sub-division of the Bhagalpur district.

35. *I A*, I (1872), pp. 47 and 54; *Bhagalpur District Gazetteer*, 1911, pp. 162-163; B. C. Law, *Historical Geography of Ancient India*, p. 211.

36. Govind Prasad Sinha, *Mandāra-Madhusūdana Māhātmya*, A. D. 1914, *taranga* 5, v. 16; Sant Lal Mishra, *Mandāra Madhusūdana Māhātmya*, Sam. 1993, chs. 23-24 (pp. 181 ff.).

37. Govind Prasad Sinha, *Mandāra-Madhusūdana Māhātmya*, A. D. 1914, *taranga* 5, v. 17.

khaṇḍa).[38] Even as late as A. D. 1851 Mandar hill was partially surrounded by jungle.[39] Or the word Baunsi may have been originally Vaṁśī (flute) as a hamlate near Baunsi is still called Vaṁśipura.

Thus Mandar occupies a glorious place in the cultural annals of India. Its inscriptions, sculpture and architectural remains invite our special attention for a close study. Research scholars may find time to discuss all these in detail. For their convenience I give below a list of the important sources of the study of Mandar hill.

ORIGINAL SOURCES

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3. *Bhāgavata* (*Śrīmadbhāgavata*) *Mahāpurāṇa*, Gītā Press, Gorakhpur, 2nd ed. Saṁ. 2008, *skandha* 8, ch. 6, v. 22.
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6. *Kālikā Purāṇa*, Venkateshwar Steam Press, Bombay, Saṁ. 1964, ch. 13, v. 23.
7. *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidāsa, canto 8, v 23.
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11. *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, ed. Jivanand Vidyasagar, Calcutta, A. D. 1879, ch. 57, v. 12.
12. *Narasiṁha Purāṇa*, Gopal Narayen & Co., Bombay, 2nd ed. 1911, ch. 40, v. 44; ch. 65, v. 7.

38. *Ain-i Akbari*, Tr. Blochmann, ed. S. L. Goomer, Delhi, 2nd ed. 1965, pp. 129-130, 362, 554, fn. 1.

39. *JASB*, XX (1851), p. 272.

13. *Padma Purāṇa*, Anandasharma Sanskrit Book Series No. 131, *brahmakhaṇḍa*, ch. 8, vv. 20-21 and ch. 9, vv. 1-3; *pātālakhaṇḍa*, ch. 105, vv. 38-54, *uttarakhaṇḍa*, ch. 1, vv. 4-5.
14. *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Miśra, ed. Raoji Sarma Gondhalekara, 3rd ed. A. D. 1886, Śaka 1807, Act 6, p. 164.
15. *Rāmacarita* of Sandhyākaranandin, ed. R. C. Majumdar, R. G. Basak and N. G. Banerji, The Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi, 1939, ch. 2, v. 5, commentary (p. 42).
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